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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY SPLIT - THE PM'S CIRCLE TO
THE FORE

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(C) The long-standing split between the professional MFA diplomats and the tight circle of advisers around PM Erdogan has widened noticeably in recent weeks. This gap has existed under Erdogan,s Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, largely because of the close links that both PM Erdogan and FM Gul have with PM adviser Davutoglu, who has been willing to undertake numerous initiatives. Until recently, however, such strains have usually been more effectively papered over. This internal debate now affects every step the GOT takes on the international stage.

2.(C) The Turkish diplomatic corps is highly educated and well attuned to what will sell in the U.S. or Europe; less so on the domestic political front. PM Erdogan,s core of AKP advisers, including Davutoglu and the AKP vice chairs, understand what will play well with their constituencies. Their sense of how policy will play outside of Ankara is handicapped, however, by their Turkey- and Islam-centric vision of how they want the world to operate.

13. (C/NF) Decoupling MFA from the PM,s advisers can produce a greater willingness to take chances. At the same time, it can also create greater room for misunderstandings or wrongfooted efforts. In the run-up to the February 2006 Hamas visit to Ankara, for example, MFA was kept in the dark. The AKPers who dealt with the visit did so in a haphazard and uncoordinated manner. MFA, uninformed, was unable to preview it with us. The backlash from the U.S. in particular truly took AKP aback. It took weeks -) even months -) before limited understanding dawned on the depth of the displeasure the Hamas venture had spawned, and why. It did not (and still does not) fit within their frame of reference.

14. (C/NF) Most startling, perhaps, to AKP were those in the U.S. and elsewhere who, in the aftermath of the Hamas visit, asked how AKP would feel if we met with PKK leaders. For Erdogan,s circle, it is not analogous: for them, terrorism equals the PKK. It is difficult for PM Erdogan to believe that his philanthropist Islamic friend Al Kadi could be involved in terrorist financing, just as it is alien to their frame of reference to view specific Islamic groups as terrorists. Hamas and Hizballah are the result of western policies gone awry, a response from desperate people)- not truly terrorists. Allow them to talk reason to these people, exert Turkish influence, and the Hamases of the world will

change. This has been evident in other Turkish efforts throughout the region as well -- with Iran (FM Mottaki,s visit here; Erdogan,s talks with Ahmedinejad on the margins of international conferences); with Syria (the Turks believe they were instrumental in getting Syria,s Asad to agree to pull troops out of Lebanon, and to certain aspects of the Hariri investigation); with the current conflict in Lebanon and the Gaza strip.

5.(C/NF) A more recent example of the PM circle-MFA disconnect involved Davutoglu,s trip to Damascus the first week of July, where he met not only with Asad but Misha,al as well. The MFA was cut out and furious (their Ambassador to Damascus reportedly cooled his heels outside while Davutoglu met with Asad).

6.(C) As the Israel-Lebanon crisis intensified, so has this tendency within Erdogan,s small circle. AKP sees own its back to the public opinion wall. Instead of exercising leadership, Erdogan -- in populist pre-election mode -- has followed. He is playing to AKP,s constituency; to those within the party who have never been positively inclined toward Israel; and to the greater regional Sunni audience that he is trying to court. Two early results, aimed at these audiences, were (1) the PM,s participation in the August 3 extraordinary OIC executive council meetin in Kuala Lumpur, where he again met with Irnian president Ahmedinejad and uttered strong anti-Israeli statements; and (2) FM Gul,s August 3 op-ed piece in the Washington Post, which aired GOT ire in an unhelpful way and blindsided the professional Turkish diplomats in Washington.

7.(C/NF) Complicit or not (we believe the former), Gul has had his name sullied by a number of these efforts. He will have to decide whether to give the MFA renewed weight -)

Foreign Ministry officials could be key in bridging certain delicate issues, particularly Cyprus, with both the government and the military, for example -) or go with the PM,s circle.

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